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## ABSTRACT

A study was designed to formulate a taxonomy of the literary response processes of children. Three fifth grade girls reading above grade level were asked to read two books that treated a common subject (the death of a child) in different ways. Interviews with the children were recorded so that their literary responses could be analyzed for emergent categories of discussion, total words uttered, turns taken during conversation, interruptions, percentages of conversations within the categories of R. P. Bales's classification for interaction process analysis, and percentages within Alan Furves's categories of literary response. These data indicated that the girls' patterns of response promoted and inhibited their approaches to a text. There was evidence for Louise Rosenblatt's contention that the reader and the text transact to create the work of art. There were as many stories created as there were readers in the study, but those stories were still socially exchangeable. The study also confirmed Arthur Applebee's findings about a child's concept of story by applying his model at the case study level. The general patterns that Applebee found across several responses were observable within the responses of the three readers: and the separation of evaluation and the creation of an evaluative hierarchy seemed both necessary and appropriate. (RL)

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Three Children Reading Stories:  
Response to Literature in Preadolescents\*

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### Theory and Research

The idea that the reader plays an integral part in the creation of a story was discussed by Rosenblatt (1938/1976, 1978) when she proposed that a story, or a work of art, exists only in the transaction between a reader and a text. Without a reader a text is merely "words on the page;" the reader's infusion of meaning into those words creates the story. This does not imply that the reader is totally free to create anything s/he desires; the words presented in the text guide the reader in a joint shaping of story (Iser, 1972, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1938/1976, 1978).

Many elements in the text play this guiding role. Vocabulary and syntax play a basic role in the shaping of response, for each sentence generates expectations peculiar to each reader which are either confirmed or denied as the reading progresses (Iser, 1972, 1978). The mode of discourse of the text also influences the reader's approach to that text (Britton, 1970), as do both the structure and the content of the text.

There have been several studies of response to literature which have indicated that the reader brings a number of individual characteristics to any reading of a text. Age, sex, socioeconomic status, reading ability and expectations, previous experience with texts, previous experience with the author, cognitive development and the situation in which the response occurs all influence any one reader's response to any text (Angelotti, 1972; Applebee, 1973, 1978; Beach, 1978; Cooper, 1969; Petrosky, 1975, 1976; Squire, 1964). Squire (1964), tapping response while texts were being read rather than after they were finished, also found that a reader's response to a story changed as the story developed. Lesser (1957) and Holland (1975) proposed that the reader's psychological needs and

personality, or invariant style, played a crucial role in the creation of story.

This study incorporates an active and dialectical model of language and reading, synthesized from the descriptions of Britton (1968, 1970), Holland (1975), Iser (1972, 1978), Lesser (1957), and Rosenblatt (1938/1976, 1978) and from the interactive and dynamic model of cognitive development explicated by Piaget (1954, 1977). The application, by Applebee (1973, 1978) and Petrosky (1975, 1976), of Piaget's theoretical framework to the response process served as a model. Further, attention was paid not only to the readers and their developmental characteristics and abilities, but also the stories the readers interacted with, in an attempt to begin to formulate a taxonomy of the literary response processes of children which is sensitive to both child and text.

#### The Design

Three fifth-grade girls attending a private school in New York City and reading above grade level were selected as participants for this study. Two texts were chosen from an array of contemporary realistic fiction appropriate for fourth through sixth grade. The texts, Greene's Beat the Turtle Drum (1976) and Paterson's Bridge to Terabithia (1977), were matched in topic but not in style. Although both authors wrote about the death of a child, the treatment of this subject was markedly different. Bridge to Terabithia is the more complex text according to several stylistic analyses and an assessment of the developmental changes of the characters. By choosing texts which differed in style rather than basic content it was hoped that the influence of stylistic elements on response to literature would become apparent.

Initial interviews with each child, held on a Friday, covered topics such as reading interests and habits as well as concept of story. Each participant was given a copy of Beat the Turtle Drum and asked to read the text over the weekend. On Monday the researcher met individually with each participant and asked open-ended questions designed to elicit a discussion of the story. On Wednesday the three participants and the researcher met as a group for further discussion of the story, which was again initiated by open-ended queries from the researcher. On Friday, each participant again met individually with the researcher at which time a third discussion of the text took place. At the conclusion of these discussions the participants were given a copy of Bridge to Terabithia and asked to read that text over the weekend. The procedure for discussions was repeated the next week. After all discussions were completed, each participant was given the moral judgment interview (Kohlberg, Colby, Gibbs, Speicher-Dubin, and Power, 1978). All interviews and discussions were taped and transcribed.

#### Analysis of the Responses

The analysis of the transcribed responses considered the stage-specific cognitive operations evident in the responses, the child's perception of characters at a particular developmental level, and the child's characteristic way of responding. It also considered the interaction in the group discussions, both within each discussion and the effect on subsequent discussions.

Pre-set categories were not imposed on the data. Rather, the protocols were studied until categories peculiar to the responses emerged (see Table 1). Unique personal styles also characterized the response patterns of

the three girls. In the classroom Emily was vivacious, dramatic, and very talkative. In contrast, Charlotte tended to hold herself aloof from her peers; she was concerned with appearing mature: "When everybody was interested in Judy Blume, I wasn't. I was interested in Passages. I wanted to read Passages but my mother wouldn't let me." Ann was generally calm and thoughtful, and was regarded as a leader by many of her classmates. These differences in the readers were evident in their responses.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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#### Expressed Concept of Story

During the initial interview the participants were questioned about their concept of story. They were asked "What is a story?" and "Where do stories come from?" as well as questioned as to their reading habits and preferences. Emily, a self-described voracious reader, preferred fantasy to other genres of literature. She was concerned with "good beginnings and endings" and glibly spoke of plot, theme, and style. According to her, "stories come from writers with good imaginations." She stressed imagination throughout the interview, preferring characters who were not real people because real people "have limitations."

Charlotte focused on conflict in stories, citing psychological, physical, and material problems as usual sources of that conflict. She felt that stories were connected to the author's real or desired experience, and that authors were usually "interesting people who have had interesting lives, because a lot of the time the story has a connection with life." She saw an author as an observer of life who offered a particular view to a reader. Her expressed preference in reading material was not for a

particular genre, but rather for adult fiction; she ridiculed "baby books."

Ann equated reading stories with hearing gossip when she said, "Reading something is the same as hearing from somebody, 'Oh, did you hear what happened?'" She had a strong sense of the role of the author in the creation of a story, stressing that an author decided what would happen in a story according to some inner need or plan. She expressed a preference for books which were "exciting" and had "a lot of things going on," preferring stories with a rich plot. She was also concerned with style: "If the author puts the words in the right places and if he uses some words to express what he feels, sometimes they'll just sound right together."

#### Patterns of Response

When examining the content of the discussions of the texts it became clear that both Charlotte and Ann had distinctive ways of approaching the texts and the discussions. Charlotte concentrated on controlling her responses. For example, she made sure that the other participants knew that she was aware of the fact that a major character in each text was going to die. At the end of the first discussion of Bridge to Terabithia the researcher asked if Charlotte wanted to say anything else. Charlotte replied: "I'd just want you to know that it wasn't a shock when Leslie died." Ann's responses were primarily concerned with the characters and their feelings. Her descriptions of the characters all stressed personality. Kate was "mature in her mind;" Leslie "filled joy into Jesse's heart." Emily's responses did not lend themselves to any equivalent category; they were diffuse.

Throughout the individual and group discussions of both books, Emily and Charlotte focused on evaluation while Ann searched for explanations.

Emily's evaluations were subjective, circumscribed by her own reality and her reactions to the texts. She criticized characters by comparing them with people she knew: "I didn't really think somebody would be so much like that because my mother had a close friend who died a couple months ago, and when he died she was very sad, but it only lasted for a couple weeks." She also criticized events in the story by comparing them with her own reality: the mourning scene in Beat the Turtle Drum didn't "fit in" because "it wouldn't be that way." Emily also evaluated the stories in terms of elements of the texts themselves, but her discussion of these elements suggested that she was merely using labels rather than discussing concepts. She talked of "good plots" and "nice themes," using floating abstract adjectives and rarely grounding her evaluation in specific details of the text.

Charlotte also focused on evaluation but was more objective in her judgments than was Emily. As one way of controlling her responses to the texts, and to her life in general, Charlotte cast herself into the role of observer. Her criticisms of the texts were grounded on her observation of life and were often explicitly stated as such: "Based on my observations, most eleven year old girls think that eight year old boys just exist." She even viewed the texts themselves as a form of observation: "If you think about it in a certain way, if you read it carefully, it's like observing human behavior." When Charlotte evaluated the text in terms of her perceived reality she presented that reality as a fact rather than an opinion, stressing typicality rather than correctness as the measure: Joss "wasn't like an eleven year old who, as it seems these days is listening to Grease 3,000 times a day." Charlotte also often evaluated

specific elements of the text, bolstering her arguments with textual documentation or direct comparisons: "It was well written, but it wasn't extremely well written. It wasn't like Kurt Vonnegut."

In both individual and the group discussions Ann consistently sought to explain the events and characters in the texts. During the group discussions her explanations were often reasoned defenses of the texts made in response to the negative evaluations of the other two participants. Ann often tried to postulate the underlying feelings of the characters as a way of explaining their actions. For example, Jesse hit his favorite sister because "he was just so mad at that point . . . he really felt he wanted to hit his older sisters, then when his little sister just said one thing he came and hit her." She distinguished between the surface and the inner personality of each character, as when she defended Bridge to Terabithia against Charlotte's criticism of Jesse's father as "macho" by saying: "When Jesse was so sad [his father] really came over to help him and I think his real personality came out. That was a fake personality before." She also defended the texts by comparing the characters with real people, careful to stress the possibility of alternate behaviors. She argued that "Some people can get over things faster than others," "Not all girls think that way," and "Some sisters are like that." Ann frequently cited the author's intentions as arguments in defense of the texts. She defended one of Jesse's actions by stating: "The author might not have described the character fully, and that was part of his character you never knew before so you wouldn't expect that." She flatly stated, "She wrote it," as a rebuttal to criticism from Emily and Charlotte. The interplay of Emily's subjective criticism, Charlotte's

objective criticism, and Ann's explanations formed a pattern consistently present in the group discussions.

Both Emily and Charlotte expressed a concern with the point of view of the texts as they criticised Bridge to Terabithia. Emily felt that Paterson "broke moods in it. She didn't keep the same kinds of descriptions. She changed things." Charlotte was more specific in her criticism:

Some of the parts where . . . the author is talking instead of one of, . . . either one of, the characters, it sort of breaks the mood of the story somehow . . . . There's a part somewhere in here where . . . they're having an argument about him not coming over, and then there was description. Here: "Still it took him a few days to feel comfortable around Leslie's father." . . . That sort of just interrupted, almost interrupted, the story tremendously in parts . . . . When the author describes it she's not describing it the way they would have talked or anything, and . . . then all of a sudden you're back to Jess Aarons, Jr.

Ann did not seem to be adversely affected by the changing point of view of Bridge to Terabithia but rather enjoyed the effect of multiple point of view, an enjoyment consistent with her preference for complex stories.

The point of view of each text affected the ability of the readers to use that text to create a virtual experience for themselves. Emily, who preferred the point of view of Beat the Turtle Drum, withdrew completely when she got too close to the crisis of Joss's death, stating that "It was so depressing that it just sort of knocked you out of it." Although she criticized the point of view of Bridge to Terabithia, it allowed her

to maintain a safe distance from the text and to thus regulate her response to Leslie's death. Emily did use the stories she created to help shape, or confirm, her perception and evaluation of her world. The stories were, for her, ways of trying on experiences as long as this was done in the safety of distance, although her reluctance to expand or alter her perceptions limited her response to the stories.

Charlotte's characteristic stance as an observer allowed the stories to be virtual experiences for her. She seemed to readily assimilate the stories she created into her schema of the way people behave, placing the characters' actions on a continuum of typicality rather than judging these actions in terms of "ought." Her constructs of the world seemed to expand to include the observations she made about the stories she created.

Perhaps because she was able to distance herself from the text and consider the alternative behaviors available to the characters, Ann was able to explicitly formulate the possibility of a death occurring in her own family. She "practiced" the experience of death and decided that her probable response to that experience in real life would be similar to the response portrayed in the texts. The characters' experience became a part of Ann's repertory in a manner less painful than the actual experience would be.

All three participants reacted to the lack of closure in Beat the Turtle Drum as compared to the closure of Bridge to Terabithia. Emily compared the two texts: "In Beat the Turtle Drum it said, 'Well, I've got to get over it' but it didn't explain whether Kate did or whether she didn't; it just ended. But you know that Jesse actually got over it. He'll have a memory of her." Charlotte wanted to change the ending of

Beat the Turtle Drum so that the parents "got over Joss's death, because if the parents never got over it in the story, it would transfer the feeling that you would never get over the story." Although they all wanted to alter the ending of Beat the Turtle Drum, none of the participants wanted to change the ending of Bridge to Terabithia. Ann expressed her satisfaction with that ending, although she was not able to specify the reasons for that satisfaction: "This story was so sad, and I was thinking to myself, 'There's no way that she'll get it to make you happy again.' But at the very end Jesse just takes his little sister and he says, 'I'm going to make you queen of Terabithia,' and it just makes you, I'm not sure why, but it just makes you happy again."

Theme seemed to be a central way in which the participants classified stories. Emily felt that the theme of both stories was that one should "hang on" and try to recover from grief. Charlotte saw the theme of Beat the Turtle Drum as being related to what happens when one is totally happy and that of Bridge to Terabithia as revolving around love and friendship. Ann, consistent in her concern with the characters and their personalities, compared the two stories:

Well, in the other book, Beat the Turtle Drum, they did talk about [how Kate] was very . . . insecure of herself and very sad and her sister makes her happy. And in this book Jesse is very . . . insecure and he doesn't have anybody, really, and Leslie makes him . . . happy. And in both books somebody dies, . . . somebody that is very important to, to Jesse and to Katie. And they both die, and it's . . . a matter of them [Jesse and Kate] getting over it and being able to accept the

fact that it happened. But at the very end I think it was a little, the two books really went their own ways and it was sort of different . . . . I think I preferred this one because it made, I really liked both endings a lot, but I think I liked this one a little bit more.

She agreed with the other participants that the theme of the stories was "getting over" a bad experience, but she went further and found similarities in the characters in both stories to support her additional theme of the security and happiness of the main characters being affected by the doomed characters.

Because the understanding of metaphor seems to be linked to cognitive development (Billow, 1975; Gardner & Gardner, 1971; Gardner, Kirchner, Winner, & Perkins, 1975; Gardner, Winner, Bechhofer, & Wolf, 1978), the researcher asked the participants what the titles of each story meant. Ann, although mature in her responses along other lines, did not discuss the metaphoric aspects of the texts until after the group discussion of Bridge to Terabithia when she spoke of the bridge as a "symbol that Jesse really doesn't want to die because he knows he has a life." Charlotte, more willing to discuss the metaphoric implications in Bridge to Terabithia than in Beat the Turtle Drum, saw the bridge as a "commemoration" of Leslie and a symbol of continued mental as well as physical access to Terabithia. Emily was the participant most able and willing to discuss metaphor. She spoke of the turtle drum as "the drum in the rhythm of youth, of life." For Emily, the rope used to get to Terabithia initially "really symbolized . . . since it killed somebody, it was like death, but a sturdy bridge was . . . safer and sort of symbolized being life more, life to a secret

place." All three participants had qualitatively richer responses to Bridge to Terabithia which contains a more complex textual metaphor than does Beat the Turtle Drum.

#### Revealed Concept of Story

Since what is said and what is actually the case are not always the same, it seemed that an area of significance might be the potential difference between what the child said about story and how she interacted with specific texts. Emily's discussions of the texts revealed that she read mostly for plot and had no clear idea of the author's role in the creation of a text. She seemed to consider the events of a story as fixed for an author, rather than controlled by an author, with style being the distinguishing feature: "[Bridge to Terabithia] should have been [Greene's] story with her writing, and [Beat the Turtle Drum] with [Paterson's] writing." She seemed unaware that authors choose not only the words they use but also the events they portray, and yet earlier she had criticised both authors for including events which "didn't fit." Her expectations seemed to vary according to the kind of story read; authors of imaginative stories were free to do anything, but authors of realistic stories were constrained by Emily's perception of reality. Emily's responses to the stories revealed that, for her, story content was a function of the adventures, thoughts, and actions of only the main characters, with very idiosyncratic additions of details. Her concept of story was wholly circumscribed by her concept of reality; what she could assimilate was acceptable, the rest was suspect.

Charlotte also had no clear concept of the role of the author. Although she indicated in the initial interview that she thought that stories

were connected in some way to the author's experience, she was critical of the events and reactions the authors chose to include, sometimes because they didn't seem to fit into the typical behavior of the world and sometimes because they did not fit into her conception of what was necessary to the story. She revealed a preference for a plot which was definitely brought to a conclusion as well as a preference for the exclusion of characters and events which did not have direct bearing on the central plot. She focused on the central conflict and found minor events superfluous. She also separated content from style, stating that Bridge to Terabithia "was more of a Constance E. Greene story," oblivious to the fact that each author was responsible for both the style and the content of the story she told. Her responses revealed that she regarded stories as primarily a combination of the central conflict and the main characters' reactions to that conflict; she was not yet cognizant of the enriching effect of minor characters and sub-plots.

Ann's responses revealed that she did, indeed, have a strong sense of the author's role in the creation of story and that she viewed story as more than a combination of events, or plot. She felt that what was present in a story was there for a purpose, whether or not she happened to understand or agree with the author's supposed intent. Her responses also revealed her preference for complex plots and multiple points of view:

I think if it was differently written it wouldn't be Bridge to Terabithia because I think it, I think everything that they talked about really made it a good story . . . . I like a story that adds little things and little details instead of just one thing. That gets sort of boring if you just read about the same thing. If it

changes I like it more.

Her ability to separate herself from the text and thus see it as another reality was also reflected in her responses and enabled her to evaluate the texts as self-contained entities.

#### Group Interaction

The group responses were marked for interruptions and overlaps and were classified according to the Bales (1950) Interaction Process Analysis Categories. Emily spoke the most words, took the most turns, and made the most interruptions (see Tables 2, 3, 4).

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Insert Tables 2, 3, 4 about here

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From the frequency of her participation it would seem that Emily was the leader of the group, since she gained and held the floor more consistently than did Charlotte or Ann. Yet, although she was the most verbal, she was not the leader. A leader was not designated by the group, except during the times that the researcher was questioning or intervening. Charlotte's contribution to the group rose considerably during the discussion of Bridge to Terabithia, as did her ability to convert her interruptions into turns. In the second discussion she had obviously decided to react to Emily's dominance by talking more rather than withdrawing as she had during the discussion of Beat the Turtle Drum. Ann's contribution remained almost constant. She spoke when she had a point to make or argue, and was silent for long periods of time, especially during digressions by Emily and Charlotte.

There seemed to be two sets of rules operating here. Those rules Charlotte and Ann initially followed were to wait until a speaker was

finished before taking a turn, to confine remarks to discussion of the text, and to keep these remarks from being unnecessarily long. Emily, on the other hand, interrupted often and, when she did, did not always use her turn to continue the discussion at hand, but changed focus and digressed. By the second group discussion both Ann and Charlotte had partially adopted Emily's tactics, and the number of interruptions rose even though the number of turns decreased.

In addition to the analysis of conversational behavior discussed above, the discussions were analyzed using the Bales Interaction Process Analysis Categories (see Tables 5, 6, 7, 8).

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Insert Tables 5, 6, 7, 8 about here

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Emily's high percent of actions in category three, agreement, resulted from her penchant for beginning her comments with "yeah," often using this word to interrupt another's turn and to hold a place for herself. Perhaps the nominal agreement which she expressed with this word was her way of justifying her interruptions. She also often agreed with another's statement and then proceeded to say something which was entirely different in meaning; or agreed with Ann's evaluation and then switched to agree with Charlotte's. Her "yeah" was floating rather than firmly anchored. Category three, agreement, comprised only 14% of Charlotte's response to Beat the Turtle Drum, but rose to 26% in the discussion of Bridge to Terabithia as her interaction with the group increased. Ann, on the other hand, expressed more disagreement than agreement in her responses. In the discussion of Beat the Turtle Drum, 16% of her turns were classified as disagreements according to the Bales Categories, while in the discussion of

Bridge to Terabithia, this figure rose to 21%. The high percent of category three, agreement, attributable to Emily and Charlotte, and Ann's high percent of disagreement, category ten, reveals a pattern basic to that discussion. Charlotte and Emily were quite critical of the story, agreeing with one another's negative evaluations, and Ann defended it, even though she was stating her opinion in the face of a united negative opinion from Emily and Charlotte.

All three participants responded most often in category five, giving their opinions, evaluations, or analyses of the text, although Emily and Charlotte did sometimes digress and give opinions which were not focused on the text. Since responses often included references to information contained within the texts, many were classifiable as category six, gives information. All three participants did give information to support their evaluations, although Charlotte did this most consistently, as reflected in her having the highest percent of informational responses.

The responses of the participants in the group discussion of Bridge to Terabithia which were classified within the Bales category five, gives opinion, or six, gives information, were further analyzed using a modified version of the Purves (1968) categories (see Table 9). The results indicated that these categories, having been developed for use in coding written responses to literature, are not especially suited to the analysis of a group discussion because the reactions of others inform, in part, the direction of the response.

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Insert Table 9 about here

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The analysis showed that the responses of Emily and Charlotte were

distributed across the nine categories while Ann had a very high incidence of interpretive responses. With only these data as a source of judgment, one might assume that the responses of Emily and Charlotte were the more mature, since they reflect an ability to approach the texts from many perspectives and the portion of their responses classifiable as evaluation, a higher-order skill, was higher than Ann's. This, however, was not the case, but it did reveal how the Purves categories obscure the importance of evaluation, both explicit and implicit.

The high percent of evaluative responses for Charlotte and Emily and the high percent of interpretive responses for Ann was directly attributable to the oral group discussion situation. Emily, who liked to talk, often offered evaluative statements which were merely facile applications of labels which lacked content, stating, for example, that Beat the Turtle Drum "had a good plot, had a nice theme." Further, Charlotte and Emily both felt that some of the actions of the characters were not consonant with their concepts of the fictional or the real world. This resulted in their engaging in a long dialogue to this effect. Statements made in this dialogue, while evaluative, were based on idiosyncratic and narrow views of both story and world. To stress the evaluative aspect of the response and ignore the basis for that evaluation would result in a misleading appraisal of the responses of Emily and Charlotte. Similarly, to classify Ann's rebuttals to these evaluative statements as "interpretation" would also result in a misleading picture of response. Ann responded to the negative evaluations of the others with interpretations which were meant to justify and explain those aspects of the story being criticized and, as such, her interpretations were evaluative in intent. They were also a higher-order

response than many of the evaluative statements of Emily and Charlotte since they reflected the ability to consider alternatives and thus to validate story elements in terms of the world of the work.

#### Discussion

Beach (1973) found that unstructured, student-led discussions helped students develop their own response strategies. It is clear that this can be the case, but that the maturity of the students must be such that they can listen and discuss. Emily couldn't. Charlotte was afraid of appearing wrong. Only Ann could participate in the group discussions as a member willing to learn as well as contribute. These differences are the result of a combination of both the participants' personal constructs (Kelly, 1955) about the world and their developmental maturity as evidenced by their other responses, as well as the amount of practice the participants have had as members of a small group gathered to discuss stories they have read. Emily's response in the group situation indicated that her constructs of reality were inflexible, that she was not using the experience of reading or discussion to alter her vision of reality. Paralleling this, it is not surprising to discover that she was also the least developmentally mature in her responses to the texts. Her behavior--interrupting others, not attending to the topic being discussed, and launching into long digressions--was also immature, and necessitated intervention from the researcher. She vacillated from Ann to Charlotte whenever there was a disagreement and was often momentarily dissuaded from her hastily formed opinions although, in the final analysis, she rarely changed her mind.

Charlotte's constructs were more flexible and she was more developmentally mature. She could listen to and exchange opinions with others

in the group, but was very conscious of her status; she didn't like to be out of control. She was so concerned with the opinions of her fellow group members that she seemed to alter her responses to the texts so that she would appear more critical, and hence more mature. Her response within the group was limited by her concern with appearance.

Of the three participants, Ann was the only one who listened and responded both to the other participants and to the topic under discussion; she alone did not extensively digress. She was sure enough of herself to argue points with which she did not agree, and was willing to listen and try to understand other points of view. Her flexible construct system allowed her to do this, as did her mature approach to the texts as offerings of alternative realities.

Each of the participants responded to the texts in her own characteristic way, with the bulk of the responses centering around evaluation. This evaluation was explicit in the case of Charlotte and Emily, implicit in the case of Ann. Applebee has suggested that "linguistically, [many] expressions of subjective reaction often carry with them an unmarked but implicit evaluation" (1973, p. 249), and that to classify these expressions as "engagement" or "interpretation" would be misleading. Some form of evaluation is present, at least implicitly, in all of the statements a reader makes about a literary work. A choice of what to attend to in a text represents a judgment; one element has been judged to be more significant than another. Thus engagement with selected aspects of a text, as well as description and interpretation of these aspects, represents implicit evaluations. The evaluations themselves are then distinguishable forms on the basis of their hierarchical distribution.

So it is, for example, with many of Ann's responses in the group discussions. These responses were frequently made as rebuttals to the often negative evaluations of the others. Many of her responses classified as interpretations were, in intent, implicit evaluations. Consequently, a comparison of the styles of evaluation reveals further differences in the responses of the three participants.

A distinction between the evaluation of subjective and of objective responses and a general developmental trend in evaluation has been proposed by Applebee (1973). The stages which he postulated are undifferentiated evaluation, evaluation as a class attribute, evaluation as a product of analysis, and evaluation coupled with generalization. Within these stages are subjective, or reader-centered, and objective, or text-centered, responses.

These categories are evident in the responses of Emily, Charlotte, and Ann. Although each girl responded to the stories at many different levels, general patterns can be seen. These patterns of evaluation reflect the way in which each responder views the world. Emily, whose explicit evaluations were essentially at the level of evaluation as a class attribute, was concerned with stabilizing her impressions of the world by extorting confirmation from others. She had very rigid ideas about the way the world should be and did not realize that it was her subjective perceptions of the world which she was describing rather than the world itself. Thus her expectations were closed, with no clearly articulated basis. Although she used literary labels to evaluate the text, her focus was on isolated elements rather than on how those elements were interrelated.

Charlotte, whose explicit evaluations were also essentially at the level of evaluation as a class attribute, focused more on evaluation of

objective responses than did Emily. Concerned with the way the world is, she adopted a detached manner, treating the world as an object separate from her responses to that object. As a result, her expectations were somewhat closed, but rested on an articulated base. She was interested in how the world works, and actively sought new knowledge with which to expand her flexible constructs as long as that knowledge was not too threatening. Charlotte relied on the evaluation of objective as well as subjective responses as a way of regulating her involvement with the text, distancing herself from the story by adopting an objective stance.

Ann's implicit evaluations were essentially at the level of evaluation as a product of analysis in which she was concerned with how the text worked, focusing on the way in which the text shaped her subjective responses. Concerned with how the world works, she entertained the possibility of alternative explanations, seeking assurance that there are, in fact, reasons for why things happen. Her constructs were flexible, reflecting a willingness to consider alternative realities. Her expectations were open-ended; she allowed herself to be affected by the work, and seemed able to separate her subjective from her objective responses.

The responses of these three readers suggest different stages of response. These stages are dependent upon both the cognitive development and the constructs of each reader. The kind of evaluation each reader makes seems to correlate with the relative flexibility of that reader's constructs. Perhaps being able to distinguish between subjective and objective worlds is, in fact, a mark of a flexible construct system.

Cognitive developmental stages are also apparent. Children at the concrete operational stage of development

continue to view stories from a single perspective: the events in a story remain made-up correlatives of events in the world. It is not until adolescence, and with it the onset of Piaget's formal operational modes of thought, that spectator-role language begins to be recognized as offering simply a possible view of the world, one among many interpretations.

(Applebee, 1978, pp. 132-133)

When examined as instances of evaluation, the responses of the three participants directly reflect this developmental difference. However, to classify Ann as "formal operational" because of her evaluative responses is to ignore her reluctance to discuss metaphoric structures. To label Emily as "concrete operational" because of her categoric evaluations is to ignore the fact that she attempts analysis and metaphoric interpretations, behaviors more characteristic of formal operations. The key, then, is not classification, but scrutiny.

Emily, Charlotte, and Ann all responded to the two texts at varying levels of developmental maturity; no one reader completely fit into any one stage description. It is Ann's flexible construct system, her willingness to accept the alternatives offered in the texts, which allowed her a more complete response to the texts. While all three participants recognized the alternatives posed in the stories; only Ann accepted them as valid. This inability to accept alternatives seriously hampered the responses of Emily and Charlotte.

The ability to accept alternatives becomes more crucial when literature is viewed as a way of expanding the horizons of its readers. To do this,

literature must introduce dissonance into the construct system of the reader which, in turn, requires the reader to either reject the literature or alter the construct to accommodate the dissonance. Emily and Charlotte rejected the dissonance; Ann accommodated to it. Because literature is often presented as a way of living through what may never be experienced in reality, it is important to realize that the potential for virtual experiences with literature will have different realizations in every reader, not only in the content of the experience but in its process as well. As was clearly indicated in the responses examined here, each reader brought her own experiences to her readings of the stories; Charlotte, Emily, and Ann were very different children, with different life experiences. Similarly, they all had a sufficient shared base of knowledge, language, and experience to enable them to discuss the stories they read and arrive at some generally accepted consensus as to the events which occurred in the stories. Their differences arose in the process of response. Superficially, these differences may be attributable to their cognitive development. However, it is argued that they arise primarily from the participants' distinct ways of looking at the world, their particular construct systems.

By isolating evaluation as a parallel component of each response, it became evident that the ability to separate and delineate subjective and objective responses controlled the maturity of the response. This delineation was accompanied by a willingness not only to introduce dissonance into one's construct system, but to accommodate to it, if only to the extent of acknowledging the dissonance rather than rejecting it out of hand.

Indeed, this willingness may be a necessary prerequisite to moving toward more mature responses. Iser (1972, 1978) discussed the way in which a reader's expectations are either confirmed or denied by a text as reading progresses. This view of reading parallels Piaget's view of learning; an active reader interacts with a text and, as expectations are denied by an element of the text, that dissonant element must be either rejected or accommodated to. Accommodation of a dissonant element necessarily modifies the reader's expectations, or schema, for the story. Thus the occurrence of dissonance in an ongoing response to a text may act as the impetus to move to another, more complete, level of responding. This move would be accomplished in both the subjective and objective realms. It may be only through this introduction of dissonance that we grow in our process of response, increasing our receptivity to the possibilities inherent in literature.

#### Implications for Teaching and Research

These students had little previous experience in discussing literature as a virtual experience in a small group situation; their classroom practice was to discuss books on a one-to-one basis with the teacher or in a whole-class situation. Perhaps their ability to profit from small group discussion would have been greater had they been used to that situation. All three girls indicated that they enjoyed the small group discussions and found them valuable. We should be certain to provide for our students a range of situations in which to discuss literature. Occasion to discuss a story on a one-to-one basis with a teacher provides an opportunity to formulate a response to a text which then may be shared with a group. During this group sharing, individual responses are presented and validated,

altered, or rejected by others in the group. It is, therefore, crucial to provide students with the opportunity to formulate and expand their responses through both individual and small group discussions. During these discussions, teachers must be aware of the ways of thinking which they encourage with their questions, being careful to provide a blend of both convergent and divergent questions which lead to the development of thoughtful responses, be they personal statements, descriptive statements, or interpretations. These questions should also promote the refinement of the evaluative response and the ability to distinguish between subjective and objective bases for evaluation.

These discussions can also provide valuable diagnostic information for the teacher. After listening to Emily and Charlotte talk about how Paterson "broke moods" it was clear that what they were discussing was point of view, and that they were responding to a more complicated world than their language would allow. An alert teacher would know that this is a perfect time to make explicit the concept, as well as the label, of point of view in literature, both to increase the students' knowledge of literary elements and to give them a way of talking about literature which would make it more accessible and their responses more complete. This differs dramatically from simply presenting a preformulated lesson on literary elements; these children were ready to learn about point of view because that concept, although unspecified as such by them, had become important to them in their reading. When the need to know is present, the concept behind the label will be more readily assimilated and can then be used.

It was also clear in these discussions that the ways of talking about literature which these girls used were often facile applications of meaning-

less labels, labels which had no adequate conceptual base. Initially, Emily sounded like she knew about literature, with her easy talk of plot and style. A thorough examination of her responses, however, showed that she had acquired the labels, not the concepts. Emily was so busy applying these labels to categorize and evaluate the disparate elements in the stories that neither story could become a unified whole for her to experience; she had not yet acquired a sense of the literary pattern to which these elements contribute. Perhaps we should spend less time doing piecemeal analysis and more time asking questions which encourage our students to make sense of what they have read as a whole, rather than in parts, to integrate rather than fragment the literature they read. By our practice of stressing the elements of literature, we unconsciously encourage a view of literature as isolated elements, an inappropriate strategy which inhibits the development of an integrated response.

The teacher has a responsibility to provide a range of literature from which to choose so that students will have the opportunity to interact with books of high literary quality, for in our sharing of books with children we should be concerned with developing their concept of and appreciation for good literature. It was clear in these discussions that the participants more fully appreciated the more complex text. It was also clear that they did not understand the reasons nor have the words to express the reasons behind that appreciation. By providing our students with quality literature we can create the basis for the development of both a clear concept of story and the means to discuss it. This does not mean that we should banish works of lesser quality from our classroom bookshelves. We need to provide a varied assortment of books for it is,

after all, only through wide reading and comparison that our students can develop a critical dimension in their responses. Further, if we insist on keeping popular literature out of the classroom, teaching only the classics, we may inadvertently encourage a view of literature which separates it into books for pleasure and books for school, and which impairs the construction of a concept of a story which would provide the basis for critical evaluation.

Teachers, as researchers, are interested in helping students develop and clarify their responses to literature. Primary to this is the need to first understand the process of response. Some research questions need to be answered before that process can be understood and described.

Should evaluation be considered a parallel category of response? Use of the modified Purves categories, omitting evaluation, along with Applebee's proposed evaluative hierarchy, as content analysis tools might provide us with a way of examining responses to literature which would result in a more complete picture of the response process. Using the Applebee categories to analyze many responses would also help clarify, expand, and validate those categories. Research with a larger number of participants needs to be undertaken in which responses are analyzed in the manner used in this study. That is, the responses need to be studied until the categories appropriate to those responses emerge, and then the combined Purves/Applebee categories applied to test their validity.

How does knowledge of literary conventions affect response? At least one of the participants seemed to fragment the stories that she read into elements which she knew were appropriate to the discussion of literature. A study comparing the interrelationship of literary labels, literary concepts, and response to literature would clarify this interaction.

What part does knowledge of social conventions play in response to literature? Two of the participants directly judged the stories they read on what they perceived as correct or normal social behavior. If this is a strong influence on response, then literature presenting a variety of social behaviors is important not only to broaden children's perspectives about the world, but also their ability to respond to the literature they read without being hampered by their own restricted social code. This ability may also be developmental.

There are differences in the responses of the participants which seem to be attributable to their cognitive developmental level, although no one participant could be classified as formal operational in all facets of her response. A longitudinal study following readers from pre-to post-adolescence, or a stratified sampling of children at different age levels, should help us clarify what can be thought of as developmental constraints and what is the result of differences in personal constructs. Accompanying this should be an examination of personality variables which might affect response. Is the relative permeability of constructs the key factor or are there others as powerful? What is the relative importance of both cognitive and affective development in response to literature?

The group discussions seemed to have only a minimal effect on the responses of the participants, and only one participant indicated that these discussions expanded her response. The ability to profit from group interaction in a discussion of literature may be a developmental phenomena and should be examined more closely. This ability may also depend upon the amount of practice students have in these kinds of discussions. Since children read and respond to literature in a school situation, the interaction of cognitive development and practice as a group should be explored further.

This study was concerned with three fifth grade girls from the mainstream American culture and their responses to two texts which are also representative of mainstream culture. Replication of this study could be undertaken with several variations. The ages of the participants could be varied to provide more information about developmental constraints on response to literature. Social constraints might be examined in a study which varies the socioeconomic status of the participants. Reading background, attitude, and level of the participants might also be varied. This study was structured in such a way that decoding would not interfere with the response process; responses would surely be affected by problems with decoding and therefore different patterns should emerge. Both texts in this study were about the death of a child. Replication with texts treating different subjects would provide some potentially valuable comparisons. Both texts in this study were also contemporary realistic fiction. Would the patterns of response have been different had the texts been fantasy or biography or historical fiction? The ability to accept alternative realities was a factor in the responses examined in this study. How would this ability affect responses to fantasy or science fiction? Does the degree of unreality in a text affect the spectator stance? Replications with all of these variations, incorporating larger numbers of participants, should help illuminate the complex process of response to literature.

This study indicates that patterns of response promote and inhibit approaches to a text. It provides evidence for Rosenblatt's (1938/1976; 1978) contention that the reader and the text transact to create the work of art. There were as many stories created as there were readers participating in this study, but those stories were still socially exchangeable.

This study also confirms Applebee's findings by applying his model at the case study level; the general patterns which he found across several responses were observable within the responses of the three readers examined in depth here. Further, the separation of evaluation and the creation of an evaluative hierarchy seems both necessary and appropriate.

The findings of this study, as well as the above suggestions for research, are important in so far as these findings inform our teaching. Often research seems to have no bearing on classroom practice, through either the inappropriateness of the research or a lack of application of research findings by classroom teachers. We are concerned here with learning how to teach literature in such a way as to clarify and develop the responses of our students so that literature becomes both a joyful and an expanding experience. To do this we must be aware of the progression, the process, of the development of response. We must be concerned with the developing functions of our students. An intensive look at the responses of these three young readers has provided us with an image of their strengths and weaknesses; further study of the response processes of other readers would help us to extend this beginning outline of the development of response which, in turn, will continue to structure and inform our teaching strategies. Because we are concerned with increasing our students' sensibilities toward literature, we must know what happens when they read literature.

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Table 1  
Emergent Categories

| Emily                          | Charlotte                      | Ann                                 |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Expressed Concept of<br>Story  | Expressed Concept of<br>Story  | Expressed Concept of<br>Story       |
|                                | Controlling Responses          | Focus on Characters<br>and Feelings |
| Focus on Evaluation            | Focus on Evaluation            | Searching for<br>Explanations       |
| Point of View                  | Point of View                  |                                     |
| Story as Virtual<br>Experience | Story as Virtual<br>Experience | Story as Virtual<br>Experience      |
| Endings                        | Endings                        | Endings                             |
| Theme                          | Theme                          | Theme                               |
| Title as Metaphor              | Title as Metaphor              | Title as Metaphor                   |
| Revealed Concept of<br>Story   | Revealed Concept of<br>Story   | Revealed Concept of<br>Story        |

Table 2  
Total Words Uttered

| Speaker     | <u>Beat the Turtle Drum</u> |         | <u>Bridge to Terabithia</u> |         |
|-------------|-----------------------------|---------|-----------------------------|---------|
|             | raw score                   | percent | raw score                   | percent |
| Emily       | 2800                        | 45      | 2160                        | 36      |
| Charlotte   | 1160                        | 19      | 1730                        | 30      |
| Ann         | 1550                        | 25      | 1687                        | 28      |
| Researcher  | 650                         | 11      | 352                         | 6       |
| Total Words | 6160                        | 100%    | 5929                        | 100%    |

Table 3  
Turns Taken

| Speaker    | <u>Beat the Turtle Drum</u> |         | <u>Bridge to Terabithia</u> |         |
|------------|-----------------------------|---------|-----------------------------|---------|
|            | raw score                   | percent | raw score                   | percent |
| Emily      | 163                         | 42      | 152                         | 41      |
| Charlotte  | 85                          | 22      | 102                         | 27      |
| Ann        | 83                          | 21      | 86                          | 23      |
| Researcher | 60                          | 15      | 32                          | 9       |
| Total      | 391                         | 100%    | 372                         | 100%    |

Table 4  
Interruptions

| Speaker    | <u>Beat the Turtle Drum</u> |         | <u>Bridge to Terabithia</u> |         |
|------------|-----------------------------|---------|-----------------------------|---------|
|            | raw score                   | percent | raw score                   | percent |
| Emily      | 70                          | 58      | 63                          | 48      |
| Charlotte  | 20                          | 17      | 33                          | 25      |
| Ann        | 25                          | 21      | 34                          | 26      |
| Researcher | 5                           | 4       | 2                           | 1       |
| Total      | 120                         | 100%    | 132                         | 100%    |

Table 5  
Bales Classification - Emily

| Category                            | Percent of Total Responses  |                             |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                                     | <u>Beat the Turtle Drum</u> | <u>Bridge to Terabithia</u> |
| 1 Shows solidarity                  | .5%                         | 0.0%                        |
| 2 Shows tension release             | 3.0%                        | 8.0%                        |
| 3 Agrees                            | 24.0%                       | 37.0%                       |
| 4 Gives suggestion                  | 0.0%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 5 Gives opinion                     | 43.0%                       | 39.0%                       |
| 6 Gives orientation, information    | 19.0%                       | 12.0%                       |
| 7 Asks for orientation, information | 2.0%                        | 1.0%                        |
| 8 Asks for opinion                  | .5%                         | 0.0%                        |
| 9 Asks for suggestion               | 0.0%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 10 Disagrees                        | 7.0%                        | 3.0%                        |
| 11 Shows tension                    | 1.0%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 12 Shows antagonism                 | 0.0%                        | 0.0%                        |

Table 6  
Bales Classification - Charlotte

| Category                            | Percent of Total Responses  |                             |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                                     | <u>Beat the Turtle Drum</u> | <u>Bridge to Terabithia</u> |
| 1 Shows solidarity                  | 0.0%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 2 Shows tension release             | 0.0%                        | 3.0%                        |
| 3 Agrees                            | 14.0%                       | 26.0%                       |
| 4 Gives suggestion                  | 0.0%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 5 Gives opinion                     | 46.0%                       | 54.0%                       |
| 6 Gives orientation, information    | 23.0%                       | 16.0%                       |
| 7 Asks for orientation, information | 2.0%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 8 Asks for opinion                  | 0.0%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 9 Asks for suggestion               | 1.0%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 10 Disagrees                        | 7.5%                        | 4.0%                        |
| 11 Shows tension                    | 6.5%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 12 Shows antagonism                 | 0.0%                        | 0.0%                        |

Table 7  
Bales Classification - Ann

| Category                            | Percent of Total Responses  |                             |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                                     | <u>Beat the Turtle Drum</u> | <u>Bridge to Terabithia</u> |
| 1 Shows solidarity                  | 1.0%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 2 Shows tension release             | 1.0%                        | 3.0%                        |
| 3 Agrees                            | 11.0%                       | 18.0%                       |
| 4 Gives suggestion                  | 1.0%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 5 Gives opinion                     | 44.0%                       | 49.0%                       |
| 6 Gives orientation, information    | 21.0%                       | 7.0%                        |
| 7 Asks for orientation, information | 4.0%                        | 2.0%                        |
| 8 Asks for opinion                  | 0.0%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 9 Asks for suggestion               | 0.0%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 10 Disagrees                        | 16.0%                       | 21.0%                       |
| 11 Shows tension                    | 1.0%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 12 Shows antagonism                 | 0.0%                        | 0.0%                        |

Table 8  
Bales Classification - Researcher

| Category                            | Percent of Total Responses  |                             |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                                     | <u>Beat the Turtle Drum</u> | <u>Bridge to Terabithia</u> |
| 1 Shows solidarity                  | 13.0%                       | 3.0%                        |
| 2 Shows tension release             | 1.3%                        | 3.0%                        |
| 3 Agrees                            | 1.3%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 4 Gives suggestion                  | 7.0%                        | 9.0%                        |
| 5 Gives opinion                     | 1.3%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 6 Gives orientation, information    | 7.0%                        | 9.0%                        |
| 7 Asks for orientation, information | 23.0%                       | 22.0%                       |
| 8 Asks for opinion                  | 46.0%                       | 54.0%                       |
| 9 Asks for suggestion               | 0.0%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 10 Disagrees                        | 0.0%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 11 Shows tension                    | 0.0%                        | 0.0%                        |
| 12 Shows antagonism                 | 0.0%                        | 0.0%                        |

Table 9

Purves Categories Analysis - Bridge to Terabithia

| Categories             | Speaker        |      |                |      |                |      |
|------------------------|----------------|------|----------------|------|----------------|------|
|                        | Emily          |      | Charlotte      |      | Ann            |      |
|                        | raw percent    |      | raw percent    |      | raw percent    |      |
|                        | score of total |      | score of total |      | score of total |      |
| Personal statement     |                |      |                |      |                |      |
| about the reader       | 12             | 15.0 | 8              | 12.0 | 6              | 11.0 |
| Personal statement     |                |      |                |      |                |      |
| about the work         | 16             | 20.0 | 8              | 12.0 | 6              | 11.0 |
| Descriptive statement  |                |      |                |      |                |      |
| narrational            | 2              | 2.3  | 1              | 1.0  | 2              | 3.0  |
| Descriptive statement  |                |      |                |      |                |      |
| aspects of work        | 4              | 5.0  | 7              | 10.0 | 2              | 3.0  |
| Interpretive statement |                |      |                |      |                |      |
| parts of work          | 26             | 32.0 | 19             | 28.0 | 26             | 50.0 |
| Interpretive statement |                |      |                |      |                |      |
| whole or work          | 2              | 2.3  | 2              | 2.0  | 3              | 5.0  |
| Evaluative statement   |                |      |                |      |                |      |
| evocativeness of work  | 2              | 2.3  | 3              | 4.0  | 1              | 2.0  |
| Evaluative statement   |                |      |                |      |                |      |
| construction of work   | 12             | 15.0 | 13             | 19.0 | 5              | 10.0 |
| Evaluative statement   |                |      |                |      |                |      |
| meaningfulness of work | 5              | 6.0  | 8              | 12.0 | 3              | 5.0  |

NOTE: Adapted from "Describing Responses to Works of Fiction"  
 by L. Odell and C. R. Cooper, Research in the Teaching of English,  
 1976, 10, 203-225.